

**Reflective Writing about Growth in Writing through Literacy**

Grades 9-12

**Skills List**

The writer of a competent reflective piece about his/her writing development through literacy skills demonstrates most or all of the following skills.

<b>CONTENT</b>
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**PURPOSE/AUDIENCE**

- Narrows focus of intended purpose
- Analyzes and evaluates growth as a writer through literacy experiences
- Provides context for reading about writer's growth
- Connects and communicates the significance of literacy strand(s) (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing)
- Selects and targets an appropriate reader/readership
- Anticipates and meets the reader's needs (e.g., reactions, questions, need for background information)
- Uses appropriate voice and/or tone suitable

**IDEA DEVELOPMENT**

- Develops ideas that are connected to and focused on literacy growth
- Makes connections to literacy experiences to analyze and evaluate writing growth and development
- Analyzes and evaluates ideas about growth in writing for intended focus and purpose
- Provides appropriate and specific examples to meet the intended purpose and reader's needs
- Adheres to conventions of chosen genre (e.g., see skills lists for letter, personal essay)

## STRUCTURE

### ORGANIZATION

- Creates a logical context for reading (e.g., engaging lead, introduction, pertinent examples)
- Places ideas and supporting details in a meaningful order
- Organizes logically and effectively given needs of selected genre
- Uses transitions and transitional elements effectively within sentences, among paragraphs, and throughout entire piece of writing
- Concludes effectively

### SENTENCES

- Writes in complete and varied sentences
- Uses variety of sentence structures to guide the reader's understanding

## CONVENTIONS

### LANGUAGE

- Chooses language appropriate and specific to audience and purpose
- Uses consistent verb tense
- Makes subjects and verbs agree
- Uses correct grammatical constructions
- Demonstrates correct usage

### CORRECTNESS

- Uses correct spelling and other conventions of language (e.g., capitalization, abbreviation)
- Uses punctuation to guide the reader's understanding (e.g., commas, dashes, semi-colons, colons where appropriate)

**As students move from grade to grade, they demonstrate growth in the control and complexity with which they use these skills.**

## KTLC Speech on Electronic Portfolios

This speech was delivered at the Kentucky Teaching Learning Conference on March 7th

Hello. I am B\_\_\_\_ R\_\_\_\_, one of the first students in Kentucky to create an electronic portfolio. An electronic portfolio is a new way of representing your writing skills. It is in a format that is easy to read, and other kids actually can enjoy reading it because it's on the internet. It is the new generation of writing, and it's why I am here today.

My electronic portfolio really helped me as a writer. It was what made me work with such vigor to develop my pieces to the best of my ability. I wanted to be one of the privileged kids to have their work on the web for all to see. It was a fun experience, and my writing skills improved tremendously. It's what inspires me to keep on working today.

Although most people don't know, I absolutely HATED to write. In fact, English was the one class that I didn't enjoy at school. I thought that writing was dumb, and people who enjoyed it had no lives. I was not thrilled that much when my teacher told me she liked my writing. I was glad I got a good grade, but I really had no care for her compliments. It was only made worse when she wanted me to improve it, for this was something I couldn't do.

Don't get the wrong idea; it never crossed my mind that I was perfect. I simply thought that I had done my best, and therefore my piece could not be any better than it was already. It was around this time that I earned a very accurate title, "The World's Most Reluctant Revisionist". For every period of English the others were strenuously working on their corrections, I stared vacuously at the paper before me, hoping the clock would spur on and let me go to a class I could enjoy. I was often scolded by my teacher for laziness, so I began to draw cartoons. It was the only way to inconspicuously pass time.

When it came time to turn in my piece, it would be the same as before, only typed to appear as if I'd actually done something. However, my teacher caught on to this and wondered why I hadn't done anything. She made it a point to teach me to revise. She would have continued trying should it have cost her her life. All of her talents were put to the test against my iron will and stubbornness, but nothing seemed to be getting through. Everything changed the day I wrote "The Creek."

During a lecture on poetry presented by Mr. E\_\_\_\_, a professor at \_\_\_\_ University, it suddenly came to me out of the darkness: I had to write a poem that expressed the laws of reality, can how to break them. I created a place that was absolutely serene, and was for everyone to enjoy. The Creek is "unimaginable to those reality binds". It is an amazing area of pure joy, where anybody can be happy and leave behind all of their troubles. The Creek is different for everyone, because although anybody can access it, it is still a "world made for you".

The Creek was "a stroke of brilliance" as my English teacher called it. However, it had some serious problems. It was too long, there were unnecessary words, and the whole thing was a bit repetitive. When I realized this, I knew I had to make some changes. The words of the past

came back to me. “Economy of words”, I heard. “Figurative language”, a voice whispered. I honestly sat down and tried to make my poem better. I revised and edited more than I had in years. I slept with a thesaurus nearby. I wanted The Creek to be the absolute best that it could be. It was my own work of art, and I wanted others to like it, not say it could have been better.

After hours of labor, The Creek was the image I had been looking for. I thought it was beautiful. I showed it to my English teacher, but what she said wasn’t what I had anticipated: “It’s good, but you need to revise it more”. I was sick, and felt like everything I had done had been for nothing. I went back into the mood that it was the best it could be, and I needn’t improve a thing. However, I was talked out of this with some inspiring words and promises, and by paying attention in class, I learned some new techniques that could improve my piece even more. I added as much as I could, although the most that I did was take things out. Economy of words, or removing words that don’t affect the poem, became my best and most important friend. An example would be changing “in a world that was created only for you” to “in a world made for you”. It helps keep the attention of your audience, and it reads better overall.

Finally, after all of my painstaking effort, I had finished a poem that I could be proud of. I wasn’t embarrassed that I had written a poem, because I thought that it was actually good. The Creek was, in my and many others’ opinions, the best thing I had ever written. In fact, it was even selected to be the strong example for poetry in the state. I was proud of my work. When it came time to publish it, I was proud to be able to put it online. Through the experience of wanting my writing to be the best it could be, and then even better, I was able to produce an entire portfolio that was something to have pride in. I received a distinguished, and for once in my life I was proud. Quite contrary to the grades I never cared for, I was now ecstatic that someone could like my writing as much as I did.

At the end of the journey, I was a better writer. I could actually enjoy writing, and constantly strove to improve my pieces. Anything I did, I felt like it could be better until the final moment it was published. Today, I still try my hardest to make whatever I write of top quality. I want everything I do to be able to be read by another student, teacher, or parent and have them like it. I want people to be glad they read my work, and want to read it again. My electronic portfolio took a lot of time and work to create, and I hope that all who read it can enjoy it.

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analyzes as a self writer

authentic audience/ readership

addresses audience

intro. provides context for reader

provides engaging lead

anticipates readers' needs by providing background with writing

conversational tone

awareness of self as a writer

focuses on experience of writing one piece to show growth

ideas developed relate to literacy growth - pertinent example

provides information reader needs to know

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#### Next Lessons

- \* making connections between writing and literacy growth
- \* using specific examples from writing to support ideas

*demonstrates characteristics of speech genre*

*'ideas placed in logical order'*

*'appropriate, effective language'*

*effective use of transitions, within sentences, among paragraphs, throughout writing*

*effective conclusion to speech*

### **One Spicy Piece of Writing**

When I was in first grade I was a small little bundle of red curls and smiles eager to please my teachers and woo them with my intelligence. If they told me to write something, I wrote just that. Nothing less, nothing more. As I progressed through my school years, I continued to create my pieces the same way. The effect of this was that my pieces were bland and boring like spaghetti sauce without any spices added. Yuck!

For some reason in the fourth grade, I began to yearn for independence from that same dreary sauce. My writing began to progress exponentially. At the time I thought that it had just “clicked” in my mind like some magical miracle. Now, looking back on it today, I realize that the change wasn’t magical at all. It came along with the books I had been reading over the year.

You see, my fourth grade year I read books one through four of Harry Potter along with the all time great classic *Gone With the Wind*. As I read these books I began to want to make my writing better. I wanted to have the effect on my readers that would make them never want to stop reading. As I read these books countless times that year I began to understand the concept of accomplishing this goal. Inserting it into my pieces and molding them to form new stages of writing became an addiction to me. I was like a mad writer. If you interrupted me I was likely to bite off your head! That was the first time that I ever realized that writing could be fun! Whenever I was stressed or had writers block on a piece I read parts of the books. When my face would finally appear from the dark depths of the book in which it was submerged, I would always feel more confident about my writing and have millions of ideas on how to improve my pieces. I would know what details to add, where to add more voice, and how to trap my reader in the story. One example of this was when I was writing my personal narrative, *Explosion* and I was at a loss for words and how to add details to make my piece come alive. I wanted my piece to seem as if it could come alive and do the Cha Cha Slide if it wanted to! I turned to *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* for inspiration. I re-read the section of the book where Voldemort came back to life and began dueling with Harry. The book described Voldemort’s anger and actions with such great detail that I could almost feel him right in

front of me! I emerged from the brain storming session with new motivation for my piece! I was ready to make my piece dance!

I changed my vocabulary to make it come alive to the reader and I added details so that the reader could feel as if they were there with me! I still remember in my Explosion piece changing the phrase with great fury to with great exasperation! It sounded ten times better after I made the necessary changes. It made my teachers' true anger come alive and jump out of the story! I made my piece to where I felt as if anyone who read it would experience my traumatizing moment as if they were in my shoes, in the exact situation, and they could feel the same emotions that had been rushing through my mind! I felt like, at that time, my piece was the best I'd ever written!

I began adding more details, opinions, and voice to all my pieces. I began to add a little spice. I was determined to imitate the great writers that I admired so immensely. That year I found out how much power words could actually have. Before they had just been a way to communicate and do what was asked of me. Now I realized that words could change the world. My pieces were now peppered with sensory details, extended vocabulary, and pieces of my own voice instead of straight facts. My writing was maturing. Slowly, but surely my writing was getting tastier. Whether I knew it or not, more people were being drawn in by my "cooking".

For awhile I was satisfied with the new level I was writing... but it was not to last. Once again I became bored with my sauce. It was just too plain. When I entered my Seventh Grade Language Arts classroom, I was determined to find new ways to develop my writing. I crossed the threshold of that small room with a single initiative in mind. As I sat there on my first day, I could tell that this year was going to be a year of innovation and learning for me. I sat and listened to our teacher, Mrs. M —, everyday and every day I unearthed new knowledge. It was like peeling an onion. Each and every day brought a new layer of comprehension. I was adding a dash of sentence variety, a pinch of new punctuation, and a generous sprinkling of opinions too. My cooking skills had advanced farther than I could have ever imagined! Once again my writing had improved! It was so filled with ingredients now that every time I tasted it; it brought a new flavor and a new surprise. I was ecstatic with my new found abilities. I was finally writing on a level that I thought was satisfactory.



Even though my writing, or my sauce as I call it, has improved enormously over the years, I am still not completely content with it. It has improved to greater levels than I ever imagined. I have learned that writing is not just something to do in school. Writing has more power in this world than anyone could ever envisage. I now know for a fact that it can truly change the world. Therefore, I intend to keep working on my writing skills, so that I might be able to change the world. I plan on looking back at my writings one day to see how my writing has grown over the years. One day no one will be able to resist my zesty sauce! They will come up to me and say, "MAMAMIA that's one spicy piece of writing!"

Reflective  
Essay connecting  
reading and writing

## One Spicy Piece of Writing

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I sat there on my first day, I could tell that this year was going to be a year of innovation and learning for me. I sat and listened to our teacher, Mrs. M\_\_\_, everyday and every day

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#### Next Lessons

- \* using specific examples to support ideas
- \* revising to delete unnecessary words, details

evidence of voice

uses food analogy to demonstrate writing growth

language is appropriate

uses a variety of sentence structures

communicates significance of literature experience

effective transitions/ transitional elements

C\_\_ G \_\_\_\_\_

Ms. W: \_\_\_\_\_

30 April 2007

### Honesty Really is the Best Policy

"Just write whatever you feel," she encouraged me.

I stared at her reluctantly and sat there with a defiant scowl on my face. I wasn't one to open up to people anyway—why would I tell a complete stranger my every secret? I thought about just making something up that sounded convincing, but she would notice. She always did. She knew every trick. I would just have to write the truth. I would have to do what she said. I would have to write what I felt.

I could feel her presence over my shoulder as I started to scribble down anything that came into my mind. My wrist began to hurt so I stopped to take a break and that's when I noticed that I had almost finished writing a whole page. I put my pencil down and began to read what I had written. *This was good.* This was better than anything I had ever written, and it was only a rough draft. I looked over my shoulder and peered into the eyes of the first English teacher I had ever had that made a real difference in my writing.

During elementary and most of middle school we had to write the same types of portfolio pieces over and over. Because it was difficult for me to think of a new topic every year for each of my writing pieces, especially memoirs and personal narratives, I began to make them all up. I didn't necessarily make up the person or event; I would, however, embellish on the relationship or actual story. For example, when I wrote a memoir about my older sister, Lauren, a few years ago, I described our morning routine. I

explained how I woke up early every morning so I could watch her get ready. I would then run and sneak back into bed so she wouldn't catch me. Continuing to describe how that memory has impacted my life, I ended by discussing what a great role model she was. Rather than explain the embellishments of that memory, however, I'll just list the true parts. I had an older sister named L \_\_\_\_\_. Despite these "lies," I skated along with passing grades on all of my portfolios until I reached the eighth grade.

Like usual, the first piece we had to write was a memoir. I decided I would write about my father, as I hadn't written a piece about him in a while. But, when I got my first draft back with teacher comments on it, I noticed a lot of red and some comments—a full page of comments, if I remember correctly. Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ was the only teacher in my whole life who had thought there was something suspicious about my writing.

"Seems a bit cliché," she had scribbled a dozen times on the four pages. "Is this real?" she questioned many more times. "Did this truly happen?" I saw a dozen more times.

I felt like someone had just discovered my darkest secret. I didn't know what to do with myself. How could this happen? I was devastated. I seriously considered dropping out of school—for all of three seconds.

I decided I would just pick a new person and make up some new stories. I chose my former softball coach who led my team to the World Series. I started writing down some anecdotes that I could remember from the time we had spent together. I found that I had enough entertaining stories without making any of them up. The next step was to discuss how I felt about our relationship. Yet another problem I had. I don't really like to talk about myself very often, much less about my feelings. I barely discuss them with my

friends and family, even when they question me. Because this was a personality trait already, it was even more difficult for me to express my feelings in my writing. When I tried, the emotion seemed exaggerated or too cliché to be real.

After settling on fixing one problem at a time, I continued with my bad habits and made up the emotion. On this draft, although there were some red marks, there were a lot less than before. Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ had still noticed my imaginative parts, though. Determined to continue scoring well on my portfolios, I had a conference with her after school. She asked me if I was making up some of the pieces of my writing. As I was about to deny her accusation with every bone in my body, I looked into her eyes. I saw something. A look of sincerity that I had never seen before. She truly wanted to help me. I dropped my head and slowly nodded it. She laughed. I jerked my head up so fast I thought I was going to get whiplash. She was laughing so hard she was crying.

“I knew it!” she exclaimed, wiping her eyes with a tissue.

Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ then went on to explain to me what was so hilarious. She told me that when she read my papers they sounded like a mixture of what every other student had written in the past with no personality or emotion. She had decided that I was either a terrible writer or I was just making things up. Still laughing, she told me that she had hoped I was making it all up, because she could work with that. I joined in on her laughter. I was so scared that I would get in trouble or get scolded for exaggerating on my writing pieces, and she was hoping that I was exaggerating.

After that day Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ worked alongside me for the rest of the year when it came to my writing. If something didn't sound realistic she would question me about it.

As the year progressed there were less and less imagined events in my writing. I began to learn how to express my feelings on paper and not feel embarrassed or ashamed.

At the end of that school year we had to write a letter to the reviewer, just as we did every year. It was as if I had forgotten everything Mrs. Reese had taught me. I used the same old format, beginning with a metaphor or simile and then lying about everything else. Since it was so close to the end of the year, we didn't have time for revision so Mrs. Reese didn't catch me going back to my old habits.

It wasn't until this year that I even thought to utilize the skills Mrs. Reese had taught me. I was going through my closet cleaning out my old schoolwork about the same time we were writing our memoirs in English. I came across my eighth grade portfolio that included all my rough drafts and all the ideas and thoughts that Mrs. Reese had taught me those few years ago flooded back into my head. I made up my mind to try and get into good habits this year and start off my writing telling the whole truth.

While I may not have gotten one hundred percent on the piece, I did get an A and I could actually show it to my family because it was all true. Watching my grandmother's face as she read the memoir I had written about her was the best feeling I had ever experienced. Judging from the tears in her eyes as I read the conclusion, "You could even say my grandmother shaped my childhood. That, however, would be an understatement," I'm pretty sure my grandmother felt the same way.

When talking about my growth as a writer, I would usually say I broadened my vocabulary, improved my sentence structure, and even learned to use better transitions. But, since I'm trying this new honesty thing, I'll just say that this year, I told the truth.

C. G. \_\_\_\_\_

Ms. W. \_\_\_\_\_

30 April 2007

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writer — also  
demonstrates  
awareness  
of reader's  
needs

narrow  
focus

writer  
Engages  
readers —  
story provides  
a context for  
readers

provides context  
for reading  
about writer's  
growth

use  
of  
punctuation  
is effective

Literacy  
experiences  
center around  
writing strand



explained how I woke up early every morning so I could watch her get ready. I would then run and sneak back into bed so she wouldn't catch me. Continuing to describe how that memory has impacted my life, I ended by discussing what a great role model she was. Rather than explain the embellishments of that memory, however, I'll just list the true parts. I had an older sister named L\_\_\_\_. Despite these "lies," I skated along with passing grades on all of my portfolios until I reached the eighth grade.

Examples  
illustrate  
growth

doesn't  
include  
unnecessary  
details

Like usual, the first piece we had to write was a memoir. I decided I would write about my father, as I hadn't written a piece about him in a while. But, when I got my first draft back with teacher comments on it, I noticed a lot of red and some comments—a full page of comments, if I remember correctly. Mrs. R\_\_\_\_ was the only teacher in my whole life who had thought there was something suspicious about my writing.

"Seems a bit cliché," she had scribbled a dozen times on the four pages. "Is this real?" she questioned many more times. "Did this truly happen?" I saw a dozen more times.

I felt like someone had just discovered my darkest secret. I didn't know what to do with myself. How could this happen? I was devastated. I seriously considered dropping out of school—for all of three seconds.

I decided I would just pick a new person and make up some new stories. I chose my former softball coach who led my team to the World Series. I started writing down some anecdotes that I could remember from the time we had spent together. I found that I had enough entertaining stories without making any of them up. The next step was to discuss how I felt about our relationship. Yet another problem I had. I don't really like to talk about myself very often, much less about my feelings. I barely discuss them with my

uses  
dialogue  
effectively  
as transitional  
element to  
further  
develop  
writing

By discussing  
difficulties  
encountered  
during writing,  
writer is  
able to reflect  
upon growth  
and analyze  
writing  
development

friends and family, even when they question me. Because this was a personality trait already, it was even more difficult for me to express my feelings in my writing. When I tried, the emotion seemed exaggerated or too cliché to be real.

*evidence of reflection*

After settling on fixing one problem at a time, I continued with my bad habits and made up the emotion. On this draft, although there were some red marks, there were a lot less than before. Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ had still noticed my imaginative parts, though. Determined to continue scoring well on my portfolios, I had a conference with her after school. She asked me if I was making up some of the pieces of my writing. As I was about to deny her accusation with every bone in my body, I looked into her eyes. I saw something. A look of sincerity that I had never seen before. She truly wanted to help me. I dropped my head and slowly nodded it. She laughed. I jerked my head up so fast I thought I was going to get whiplash. She was laughing so hard she was crying.

*provides specific examples to meet intended purpose and readers' needs*

"I knew it!" she exclaimed, wiping her eyes with a tissue.

Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ then went on to explain to me what was so hilarious. She told me that when she read my papers they sounded like a mixture of what every other student had written in the past with no personality or emotion. She had decided that I was either a terrible writer or I was just making things up. Still laughing, she told me that she had hoped I was making it all up, because she could work with that. I joined in on her laughter. I was so scared that I would get in trouble or get scolded for exaggerating on my writing pieces, and she was hoping that I was exaggerating.

After that day Mrs. R \_\_\_\_ worked alongside me for the rest of the year when it came to my writing. If something didn't sound realistic she would question me about it.

*connects and communicates significance of literacy experience (writing strand)*

As the year progressed there were less and less imagined events in my writing. I began to learn how to express my feelings on paper and not feel embarrassed or ashamed.

At the end of that school year we had to write a letter to the reviewer, just as we did every year. It was as if I had forgotten everything Mrs. R\_\_\_ had taught me. I used the same old format, beginning with a metaphor or simile and then lying about everything else. Since it was so close to the end of the year, we didn't have time for revision so Mrs. R\_\_\_ didn't catch me going back to my old habits.

It wasn't until this year that I even thought to utilize the skills Mrs. R\_\_\_ had taught me. I was going through my closet cleaning out my old schoolwork about the same time we were writing our memoirs in English. I came across my eighth grade portfolio that included all my rough drafts and all the ideas and thoughts that Mrs. R\_\_\_ had taught me those few years ago flooded back into my head. I made up my mind to try and get into good habits this year and start off my writing telling the whole truth.

While I may not have gotten one hundred percent on the piece, I did get an A and I could actually show it to my family because it was all true. Watching my grandmother's face as she read the memoir I had written about her was the best feeling I had ever experienced. Judging from the tears in her eyes as I read the conclusion, "You could even say my grandmother shaped my childhood. That, however, would be an understatement," I'm pretty sure my grandmother felt the same way.

When talking about my growth as a writer, I would usually say I broadened my vocabulary, improved my sentence structure, and even learned to use better transitions. But, since I'm trying this new honesty thing, I'll just say that this year, I told the truth.

#### Next Lessons

- \* using strong transitional elements within sentences and among paragraphs
- \* anticipating reader's questions and reactions

uses variety of sentences

variety of sentences

conclusion connects back to intro and title

correct usage throughout

PO Box 1525  
H: \_\_\_\_\_ KY 40: \_\_\_\_\_  
February 22, 2007

Mrs. V \_\_\_\_\_ B \_\_\_\_\_ English Teacher  
H: \_\_\_\_\_ High School  
420 E. Central Street  
H: \_\_\_\_\_, KY 40: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Mrs. B \_\_\_\_\_

Famous U. S. novelist William Styron once said, "Let's face it, writing is hell." This poignant statement describes the way I often view writing. I have never been confident as a writer, but as I look back over my twelve years in the H: \_\_\_\_\_ I: \_\_\_\_\_ School District, I can say without reservation that my biggest growth as a reader and writer happened in two of your classes: English II and Senior Writing Seminar.

I must admit that there were times in elementary and middle school when I used new writing styles and techniques that allowed my skills as a writer to improve—but my writing remained shallow and childish. However, in the first semester of Senior Writing Seminar, your use of new writing methods and solid, distinguished examples became a foundation that transformed me into a decent analytical writer and critical thinker. Reading essays such as Annie Dillard's "Living Like Weasels" and Lydia Nelson's "A League of My Own" provided new and inventive ways to display my thoughts on paper. This change has helped prepare me for the difficult styles of writing I would have been otherwise bombarded with when venturing off into a new world of college, and now I feel fully prepared to tackle any challenges that college writing can bring my way. But I must also admit, that while the majority of my improvements happened in your classroom, it began as a child through working on basic reading skills at home.

As a child, my parents often read stories to me such as *Where The Wild Things Are* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*. As I got older, we moved into more difficult reading material, including Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and C.S. Lewis' *The Magician's Nephew*. Being exposed to this caliber of reading material allowed me to be "one step ahead" of the reading we did in school, but this reading did not make any obvious improvements in my writing. There were more subtle topics with which I never struggled, such as fragments or run-on sentences; however, I could not tell a big impact had been made on my writing.

*Until sophomore English, anyway.*

Reading Charles Dickens' *A Tale Of Two Cities* in your English II class forced me to dig deeper into the reading material and see more than just words on the page. Instead of simply following a plot like we did when tracing Tom Sawyer's adventures and mishaps, this novel with which you challenged us even as young sophomores caused us to think outside the box and read on an analytical level. This new level of reading was

highly evident in my writing, as well. I learned that simply knowing the “who’s” and “what’s” of a story were not enough—in reading or in writing. I moved away from just focusing on plot and character development, and I looked for ways to connect to *my* reader on the deep, analytical level with which Dickens connected to me. This method is extremely evident in my college essay. In this letter to the Office of Admissions at the University of Louisville, I learned to not only tell basic, everyday details about myself, but to think in a way that connects the details of what makes me who I am, and allow myself to be transparent enough to see the various aspects that make me who I am.

Let me interject here, and say that a large part of my growth as a writer happened outside the classroom, and now I have finally reached a point of being able to say that there are some very positive aspects to being a teacher’s kid. The extra hours I spent working on my fear narrative as you pushed and encouraged me to be a deeper thinker provided new outlets through which I could write. For example, while working on this difficult piece, I had to invade everything about who I am and analyze why I was scared of “just letting go.” I also learned some techniques that make my writing stronger and more efficient. I learned to incorporate long dashes—which allowed me to set apart my own thoughts and comments—and my writing has benefited from it. Along with this new technique, I began to use a variety of sentence structures, offering variety to the structure of my narrative.

Dickens’ novel was, for me, a wonderful source of this varied sentence structure. Through reading the novel, we analyzed how we could become stronger writers by modeling his work. Most teachers would be lenient to use such a difficult piece with an age group as young as sophomores. But instead of approaching this novel as an impossibility, you forced us to mature into stronger, more mature and literate students. Receiving this encouragement both at school and at home allowed me to broaden my view of possibilities as to what I am capable of doing both in reading and in writing. I used to struggle with low self-confidence about both my reading and writing. However, as I have gone through these two classes, I have learned not only how to try to improve these skills, but more importantly I have also learned new ways to make my writing truly speak my voice. For example, in my college entrance essay, my opening statement begins: *I am going to fill you in on a little secret: I don’t care what other people think about me.* In any other piece I have written, I would never have thought to open an essay in this way. I would have thought it to be too informal, or colloquial—and in some cases, it would be just that. However, you showed our class that speaking our own voices would be a way to connect directly to the reader, which, in my case, was the Executive Director of Admissions at the University of Louisville. Writing in my own, unique voice has given me more confidence to write different types of pieces, and I feel better prepared now when I write by myself. As I now think about branching out on my own and approaching a new, exciting area of education, I feel prepared and equipped with the skills I need to prove myself to be both a strong and unique writer.

Thank you for your willingness to approach things in new, creative ways, and more importantly for not ever lowering your expectations for me either as a daughter or a student. Thinking about my literary growth through these two classes has left me amazed at how much ground we covered in two semesters. And even though I am sure that there will be times down the road that I will still agree with William Styron's view of writing, I feel much more confident that I have the skills needed to write well and efficiently. Thank you for pushing me to be a more mature critical thinker, analytical writer, and literate student.

Sincerely,

A Very Impacted  
Teacher's Kid

PO Box 1525  
H: \_\_\_\_\_, KY 40: \_\_\_\_\_  
February 22, 2007

adheres to  
conventions  
of letter

Mrs. V: \_\_\_\_\_ B: \_\_\_\_\_ English Teacher  
H: \_\_\_\_\_ High School  
420 E. Central Street  
H: \_\_\_\_\_ KY 40: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Mrs. B: \_\_\_\_\_

Reflective letter  
analyzing writing growth  
through reading experiences

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focuses  
on  
influence  
writing  
classes

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appropriate  
voice/tone

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Fragment  
used  
effectively as  
transitional  
element

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uses  
examples  
to support  
purpose



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Sincerely,

*demonstrates overall  
correctness*

A Very Impacted  
Teacher's Kid

### Literary Dreams

The gradual process of learning to read and write well began for me when I was a young girl begging for a bedtime story. Every night, one of my parents would tuck me in and let me pick a book from the shelf in my room—Goodnight Moon was my favorite. I was childishly impressed with my parents' ability to "make up" stories from nothing but pictures that didn't always have a lot of detail. Later, I learned to decipher the strange characters on the page and even to write stories of my own. My experiences in middle school and high school have helped me make my writing more concise and coherent, and reading will always be my preferred outlet in times of stress.

I cannot say that I recall the moment when written words first made sense to me. I, like most kindergarteners, developed a writing system of my own that no adult alive could comprehend. But by the time I reached second grade, I noticed that most of the other children in my class were still stuck in their personal systems while I was busy learning about the real thing. They would see words like "said"—words that they spoke every day—and stumble over the pronunciation. Stringing words together to form logical sentences was out of the question. I felt like my ability to function in the real world (in a literary sense) was a secret gift.

The Accelerated Reader program was first introduced at my elementary school that year; I decided to be adventurous and check out a book on the fifth grade level. That was the first and only time I ever failed a test. Chastened, I started with a book on my own grade level and gradually worked my way up to more complex works. Reading opened a new world to me, one in which it didn't matter that I was a chubby dork with glasses. This was *my* world, where I could imagine being courageous even though I was afraid of the dark and I could build friends to supplement my lack of close comrades in the classroom.

My elementary school teachers were quick to show off my writing, and their compliments of my longer work led me to acquire the idea that the length of a piece indicated its quality. Once, I was given an assignment to write a story using six vocabulary words. My story about a stranded alien averaged a page for each of the required words. That changed in middle school. I encountered a teacher, Mrs. H\_\_\_ who judged what I was saying, not just how much I said. She would circle whole paragraphs and ask me what made them relevant to my writing. Mrs. H\_\_\_ also insisted that we use paragraphs that were at least seven sentences long and chock full of details. As a result, I gained a foundational understanding of underlying purpose and supporting information.

Then came high school, where my few early insights into a sophisticated style were obliterated by the introduction to a new type of writing: B. S. I was always so pressed for time that there were few assignments into which I put a considerable amount of work. And reading for fun? Well, I didn't hate books by any stretch of the imagination, but I no longer saw the point in pushing myself toward more thought-provoking works. Instead, I reread middle school favorites or picked up children's books for a break from schoolwork. I began to dread the mention of an essay assignment, though I didn't worry about my skill as a writer because I assumed that if I wanted to, I could reach into myself and find inspiration when it really mattered. But when I actually did start to try again, I discovered that I no longer possessed the ability to simply spout genius; in fact, I realized that I had never known true talent at all.

It was an academic team competition that brought this truth home to me. I competed in persuasive writing, and I had placed well as a freshman and sophomore. My junior year, another girl was added to the team. I respected her academic ability, but I had never considered her writing as equal to mine. She won the regional competition, and I didn't place at all.

I had to step back and assess how my attitude had changed during my high school years and decide whether or not the damage was irreparable. It was true that I hadn't dedicated myself to reading a difficult book or writing an insightful essay for a while. Early praise had given me a false confidence, and I had been resistant to peer criticism of my writing. If I was going to improve, I was going to have to humble myself and seek assistance. I would have to put effort into my writing at all times.

My fellow students have helped me as I have worked to cultivate my writing. I used to disregard their comments because I assumed that when I entered the wide world, the literary community would instantly realize that I understood how to write well. What I failed to recognize is that the "wide world" is made up of people like those I am in class with. If my classmates think my writing is verbose or poorly organized, no one else will understand it either. I have to write to real people.

L. M. Montgomery's book *Emily of New Moon* is about a young girl who aspires to be a writer. The girl's mentor revises her writing ruthlessly and constantly attacks her with advice. At one point, he tells her to read better books because her style reflects that of her favorite authors. I, like Emily, am guilty of reading books that are not good for my literary health. When I began to ask my academic team friend about the books she read, I perceived that her repertoire was vastly more extensive than mine. Recently, I have revived my habit of reading "good" books such as *Moby Dick* and *Ben Hur* instead of whatever my little sister happens to bring home from middle school. I've noticed a difference in the quality of the words I use, both in my writing and when speaking to my friends, and it is becoming easier for me to organize my writing logically.

I will continue in this journey through the English language as I graduate and attend college, where I will write literary analyses and lab reports until I never want to sit at a keyboard again. It will be toilsome to preserve my desire to continue expanding my knowledge, but I will devote myself to learning more.

Literary Dreams

Reflective Personal Essay

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focuses on purpose of reflecting about literacy

demonstrates evidence of reflection about experiences

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Example supports reflection

transitions lead readers through

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Variety of sentence structures

It was an academic team competition that brought this truth home to me. I competed in persuasive writing, and I had placed well as a freshman and sophomore. My junior year, another girl was added to the team. I respected her academic ability, but I had never considered her writing as equal to mine. She won the regional competition, and I didn't place at all.

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identifies  
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a writer

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Overall, essay demonstrates  
control of conventions of  
language